

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, January 23, 2012 – 1:00pm**  
**Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- Directors: Matt Meersman, Rachel Smith, Eric Kerney, Daragh Deegan, Geoff Cripe, Jim Coury
- Watershed Council: Bill Courliss, Union Lake Com. Assoc.; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County, MI DC; John Law, St. Joseph County, IN Surveyor's Office; Bob Jones, Lagrange County SWCD; Zac Martin, Steuben County SWCD
- Visitors: Deborah Haak, Three Rivers Public Library

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

**Minutes** of the December 2013 board meeting were approved as submitted with a motion by Jim Coury and, a second by Daragh Deegan.

**Treasurers Report** was presented by Matt Meersman in the absence of Treasurer Danielle Meersman. Matt summarized expenses that occurred since the December 2013 meeting including a fee for renewing the FotSJR P.O. Box. Matt also noted that there was some account activity surrounding the Wetland Partnership Grant, with funds coming in to the account and going out to pay grant expenses.

**Old Business**

**Wetland Partnership Project** – Matt provided an update on the status of the Wetland Partnership Project. With the project in its final stages, Matt indicated that the Partnership is continuing aggressive outreach. In the next month, he is meeting with the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) to discuss putting the wetlands data on their GIS website, a public tool that is focused on Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties in Indiana. The Partnership's desire is to make the wetlands data available on public GIS resources, with the ultimate goal of users being able generate their own wetlands data reports. Thus far, Matt has been manually generating wetlands reports, which is a tedious process. He will be discussing this topic with MACOG, and he also indicated that there are some funds left in the grant that could be used to hire a firm to optimize the report generation process.

Matt will also be meeting soon with MDEQ staff to discuss options for displaying the data on public GIS sources in Michigan. He also thinks working with Counties will be a good option for making the data available to the public. In the month of February Matt and Partners will be presenting the Wetlands project to the Elkhart County, Lagrange County, and St. Joseph County, Indiana Plan Commissions. Eric Kerney also discussed the proposed outreach event that will be hosted by the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi. Eric is working on finalizing a date for the event which will focus on the northeast portion of the Watershed, including the Pine Creek, Nottawa Creek, and others.

**Clean Water Campaign** – Matt and Geoff Cripe stated that there was no new business to report. Geoff mentioned that a solid framework needs to be developed for this project before efforts can go much further. Among several other things, the framework would include aspects like what type of projects would be funded, project ranking criteria, and who is involved in selecting projects. Rachel Smith suggested that the watershed could be split into different regions for this project. This might be a way

of easing concerns from contributors about where funds are spent in the watershed. She and Matt also discussed using the Watershed Management Plan as the foundation for funding projects. Bill Courliss suggested developing a project ranking system for applications received.

**Annual Meeting Planning** – Matt announced that he has been talking with Dr. Hans Kok, of the Indiana Conservation Cropping System Initiative, about being the featured speaker at the Annual Meeting. Matt mentioned that Dr. Kok's schedule did not work for March 10<sup>th</sup>, and that Dr. Kok's availability was very limited in March. Dr. Kok also indicated that his program would likely charge a fee in the \$200 dollar range. Matt indicated that this fee was relatively close to what the Friends has paid for previous Annual Meeting speakers. Matt proposed moving the Annual Meeting to Friday March, 14<sup>th</sup> noting some pros and cons for having the event on Friday. Those in attendance agreed that it was a pretty good idea and worth giving a try. Jim Coury and Rachel Smith also spoke favorably of the theme of the meeting and having Hans Kok as the speaker. The proposed theme, speaker and date were accepted by the board with a motion by Geoff Cripe and a second by Jim Coury.

Matt also noted that there is quite a bit of work to do for planning the meeting and encouraged those in attendance to help with the silent auction. Geoff announced that through his connections he was able to secure a rafting trip on the Salmon River as a silent auction item. Matt expressed much gratitude to Geoff for this phenomenal item that has a huge retail value. Matt also announced that he planned to keep the event fee at \$25 this year. Matt said that he and Geoff would start working on the event flyer but needed a nice catchy title like those used in the past. Matt stated that he would probably reach out to Leah Cooper to see if she can assist with the design of the flyer.

There was a little discussion asking sponsors to help underwrite the event. Matt said that between he and Geoff, they would probably seek sponsorship from the SWMLC as they have in the past. Daragh Deegan suggested asking AEP to help as they have in the past, however, Matt wasn't sure if AEP could still help. Daragh said he would contact Jeff Reece on the matter. John Law asked if the group would also consider asking Enbridge Oil Co. to be a sponsor. Jim Coury wasn't sure if Enbridge would consider this, but he said he would be willing to run it by his contact at Enbridge.

**Board Recruitment** – Rachel Smith announced that she had contacted all board members who's terms are expiring in 2014, with the exception of Eldred Adams. She plans on making contact with Eldred very soon. Of those that she had spoken with, only Daragh Deegan indicated interest in returning, opening up at least three seats on the board. Rachel mentioned that she has contacted Jared Foster, with Native Connections as a possible board member. Several others have been approached including Donna Hunter, former board member and Lagrange County SWCD Manager; John Law, St. Joseph County Indiana Drainage Board; Bob Jones, Lagrange County SWCD; and Zac Martin, Steuben County SWCD. John Law, Bob Jones, and Zac Martin all indicated interest as serving as board members or continuing in their role on the watershed council. Donna Hunter indicated that she would let Matt know shortly if she is interested in returning to the Friends. Bob Jones suggested John Senecal, owner of the Trading Post in Mongo as a potential board member or watershed council member.

### **New Business**

**2014 Watershed Stewardship Award** – Matt passed out two nomination forms that he had received for the Board for the Watershed Stewardship Award. Both nominations were actually for the same person, making the decision an easy one for the board. Matt summarized his connections with the nominee stating that he felt the person was a good candidate for the award.

## **Other Items**

Daragh Deegan asked the board if they would be willing to authorize Matt to sign a letter of support for an Urban Waters grant application that he was working on. Daragh's grant application is for funds to enhance his biological monitoring program. Geoff Cripe made a motion to approve the letter of support, with a second from Jim Coury.

Matt Meersman announced that he will be meeting with the Michiana Watershed group on February 18<sup>th</sup> to discuss continuing momentum from the recent Green Town Michiana event. Matt encouraged others to attend the meeting which will be held at the St. Joe County Public Library in South Bend at 6:00pm

Matt also announced that he has been invited to the Annual Michigan Water Environment Association Meeting held in Lansing on March 26<sup>th</sup>, to sit on a panel for Successful Watershed Groups. Matt and Rachel Smith both encouraged others to attend the event.

Bob Jones announced that the Lagrange County SWCD will be hosting the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference at the Michiana Event Center in Howe on February 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. Bob said that this is a big event for their District, with topics that are often targeted towards the Amish community in Lagrange County.

Bob also presented the Lagrange County SWCDs annual report. They have taken a unique approach to their report by printing it on colored annual calendars. The calendars featured many nice pictures with a lot of good information. Those in attendance agreed that this was a neat idea.

## **Next Meeting**

February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1:00pm at the Three Rivers Public Library

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm